

The Delegates

A Jolly House Party and a Disappointed Storekeeper

By FRANK H. SWEET

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The one daily train between Pinery and Sexton was snowbound at Chestnut Gap, with snow still falling. It might get through in twenty-four hours, and it might not in a week. All depended on the length of the storm and the energy of the four or five men who constituted the repair and emergency force of the short narrow gauge road.

Ordinarily it would have made little difference, for passengers were rare and speed unimportant, but on this day it happened there were seventeen delegates converging from various parts of the state to a church convention appointed at Pinery because the small church there was the oldest in the state and this day the anniversary of its building. Moreover, there were the proprietor of the one little grocery store and the energetic wife of the aged pastor, both returning from Sexton with various supplies for the sustenance and entertaining of these same delegates during the three or four days of their proposed stay. So it was a matter of perplexity and consternation to the engineer and conductor when the wheezing train ran its head into a snow bank at the gap and came to a standstill.

The country along the railroad was wild and sparsely settled, with Chestnut Gap at its most desolate point. Twenty or more rods back from the road, with only a winding path leading to it, was the only house in ten miles, a one room cabin and left with wooden shutters for windows and a mud and stick chimney built at one end. To this the delegates plowed their way through the snow, the men kicking out a path as well as they could for the women, who struggled in Indian file behind.

A girl of fourteen or fifteen opened the door, eager eyed and excited at more visitors than she had seen in her life. An old man was bending over the fireplace, but rose and hobbled forward at their entrance.

"Come in, come right in," she cried hospitably. "Just make yourselves at home. Kinder wint'ry out, ain't it? What! Wimmen too? Here, crowd 'em, the fire an' warm up an' dry 'em. Wimmen first."

"They did so laughingly, though most of them were shivering. A young man quickly gathered up all the wood the cabin seemed to contain and threw it upon the fire, turning apologetically to the host after he had done so.

"We need thawing out first," he explained, "and you invited us to make ourselves at home. But never mind the fuel. There are eight men in our party, and we will soon have more. The conductor tells us we cannot get away under two days and perhaps not under a week. Now, what can you do for us?" with a quick and rather quizzical look about the cabin. "What sort of accommodations and provisions can you furnish?"

"Plenty o' both," he heartily. "They's a loft overhead jest the size o' this room, 'cept for the roof bein' slantin'. Wimmen can have one an' men t'other, an' I raised a heap o' turnips last fall—more'n four acres. I did figger to sell 'em, but price was so scandalous low that Bet Ann an' me berried 'em in a hole under the floor. Lucky, too, now, ain't it? But say! What might your name be? I'm Lem Tucker."

"Thank you. My name is Tom Ashley. I am glad you have so many turnips. Now, what sort of other provisions have you to go with them?"

"Why, nothin'," he genially. "Ye see, my land's too poor to raise other stuff. But turnips is mighty good an' healthy an' digestsive, an' Bet Ann an' me eats 'em right along. We like 'em. Bet Ann has some snares out back o' the house an' now an' agin catches a rabbit for relish. Ye see, I'm too roomatly for goin' out in weather. But of course one rabbit wouldn't be much relish for all your folks."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Ashley. He turned to his companions. "You hear what our host says. I am glad you all love turnips."

"There was a slight shiver through the group. They had, of the women rose bravely to the occasion.

"We always have turnips with our Christmas dinner at home," she said cordially, "and occasionally at other times, I believe. This will be such a nice chance for us to familiarize ourselves with its possibilities. Of course they can be cooked in different ways. Now, Mr. Tucker, are we to have the upstairs room or this? I think many of the ladies have wet feet and might like to change. We brought our bags from the train."

"Why, jest take your choice," he benignly. "It's all yours. Make yourselves at home. But folks 'll have to be goin' in an' out this room, fixin' the fire an' doin' things, so mebbe the loft 'll be best for the wimmen. Bet Ann 'll show ye. Go right up through that hole in the corner, an' don't be skeered o' the ladder. I made it myself, an' it's strong an' stiddy."

When they came down, one by one, they found a great pile of firewood beside the hearth, which the men had gathered, and Mr. Ashley was out behind the cabin examining Bet Ann's snares and preparing more. There was

no gun in the cabin, and naturally none of the party had one.

The woman who had spoken of familiarizing themselves with the possibilities of turnips soon possessed herself of all the information her companions had on the subject and then, with Bet Ann as grinning and delighted chief helper, set about preparing two bushels or more of them into as appetizing dishes as the scant accessories of salt, pepper, hot water and fireplace would allow. But, though they were all hungry, the first meal was not a very hearty one.

Amidst the delegates was amateur talent of various kinds, and the long evening was devoted to singing, to impromptu lectures and informal talks to charades and tableaux and games and sleight of hand performances, the latter given by some of the more versatile young men.

The next day it was still snowing, with the depth and drifts too formidable to attempt to escape from the gap, and the evening's diversion was continued, with only such breaks as turnip cooking and miring through the snow to Bet Ann's snares and animated but desultory conversation.

On the fourth day a rabbit was caught and went into the making of a memorable broth that was to soothe twenty-six ravenous appetites. After that the rabbits seemed to have an inkling of the abnormal cabin appetite, for no more ventured to even approach the bait that Bet Ann and Mr. Ashley strewed about the snares.

These days had been a season of continuous and bewildering delight to Bet Ann, and even her father's face had beamed as it had never beamed before. Lem Tucker was a recluse who did not believe in people because he had never known much about them and who condemned education because he had none of it himself. People were wicked, and to be able to read was to find things in newspapers that were lies. So Bet Ann had never learned her letters.

But a week with the earnest, jolly, delightful party of delegates had given a new expression to Tucker's eyes. When the sixth day brought a snow-pow pulling through the drifts and the party began to make preparations for departure his face showed real regret. Bet Ann was voicing her grief noisily.

"We've had the best time of our lives," Tucker said as he hobbled to the door to say goodbye. "Mebbe I've been mistook 'bout folks. There ain't none o' you wicked, an' all them things you read was real grand. I've been thinkin' it over, an' I guess I'll move down to the village an' give Bet Ann a chance for schoolin'."

"That will be nice for both of you," commended one of the women heartily. "And be sure you let me know at the address I gave you. We will send some books and other things to Bet Ann and you. Now, goodbye."

When they reached the train the only discontented one seemed to be the storekeeper. He muttered to himself for awhile, then blurted out:

"Ye paid an outlandish price for these turnips."

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Mr. Ashley. "We are perfectly satisfied. We were glad to pay well for them and for the accommodation. And you should remember Mr. Tucker did not really charge anything. It has been a jolly week. The only drawback I can think of is that we could not get to a store to buy some more provisions."

"If I'd knowed things was to be paid for I could 'a' let ye have plenty," the storekeeper grumbled.

"But your store is too far away."

"Oh, I've got plenty right here on the train," discontentedly. "Only bein' delegates, I thought mebbe ye'd have to be took care of free. I wisht I'd—"

But the look on Mr. Ashley's face suddenly silenced him, and he slunk away to a seat by himself. And at that moment came a series of jerks and bumps which were preliminary to getting the cars in motion; then the train started.

Peary as a Student.

When Robert Edwin Peary was a student at Bowdoin college, as a member of the class of 1877, the professor of civil engineering, George L. Vose, directed him to a difficult problem. A large, complicated covered wooden bridge had been constructed across the Saco river without due respect for scientific principles. When the bridge threatened to fall, the designer telegraphed another bridge into it in such a curious way that the fall of the whole structure was even more imminent. Peary was sent to make a drawing showing just what beams and pins would give way first and just how the strain would feel its course from weakness to weakness. It was an extremely complicated problem, involving test after test and persistent calculations. Yet, shortly after Peary made his full report, the bridge collapsed precisely as he had predicted. Professor W. T. Foster in New York Post.

Limited Responsibility.

Little Septimus had been very good and had recited "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck" with admirable feeling for the benefit of his Uncle Robert.

"He's a wonderful boy!" exclaimed that gentleman enthusiastically. "And he deserves to be rewarded."

So saying, he plunged his hand into his bulging pocket and with much difficulty—for he was rather portly—extracted a penny, which he offered with great importance to his good little nephew. "Remember, my boy," he said, "that if you take care of the pennies the shillings will take care of themselves."

Poor little Septimus looked rather dubious. "I do take care of the pennies, Uncle Robert," he answered sadly, "but as soon as they get to be shillings my papa takes care of them for me."—Washington Herald.

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Time Table.

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Effective 5 a. m. May 9th, 1909.

NORTH BOUND.

No. 320—Cairo—Evansville

Accommodation leaves..... 6:00 a.m.

No. 302—Evansville and Mattoon Ex-

press..... 11:30 a.m.

No. 338—Paducah—Central

City Accommodation leaves..... 3:45 p.m.

SOUTH BOUND.

No. 341—Hopkinsville mixed

arrives..... 11:25 a.m.

No. 301—Evansville Express

arrives..... 6:35 p.m.

No. 321—Evansville—Hopkinsville—Louisville Mail,

arrives..... 3:40 p.m.

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TIME TABLE

EFFECTIVE OCT. 17, 1908.

EAST BOUND

No. 12, Clarksville and Nashville Mail leaves..... 6:30 a.m.

No. 14 Clarksville and Nashville Mail leaves..... 4:00 p.m.

WEST BOUND.

No. 11 Clarksville and Hopkinsville mail arrives..... 11:20 a.m.

No. 13 Clarksville and Hopkinsville mail arrives..... 8:15 p.m.

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